A cult classic is born at EZTV

Hipsters pack video parlor to watch 'They Must Be Told'

R.S.V.P.

JEANNINE STEIN

The hottest "home movie" of the year may turn out to be a quickie video that cost $300 to make and was supposed to be a birthday present for singer Lauren Wood.

Instead it turned into an hour and a half long program that took 2½ years to make, stars people like Linda Ronstadt, Karen Black, Pee Wee Herman and Toni Basil, and may become a cult classic.

The title is "They Must Be Told," and it screened Wednesday night at EZTV, a video screening room in West Hollywood where hipsters packed the place to watch it and party down.

Wood, Ed Millis and songwriter Allee Willis ("Neutron Dance") conceived, produced and directed the video, which has something to do with a character called Little Tu (played by Wood) who tries to solve the world's problems. Along the way she's sidelined by evil people (Buck Henry, Teri Garr) and others, but never loses sight of her goals.

Bodies were stuffed into the sweaty back room of the video parlor waiting for the show to start. It was held off until Wood, as Little Tu, made her entrance from the trunk of a 40-foot maroon limo that was so long it sagged in the middle.

Prior to that guests rubbed elbows under fluorescent lights and dined on delicacies like candy bars, popcorn and processed cheese sandwiches on white bread. In the crowd we spotted Irene Cara, Pee Wee Herman, Bud Cort, Melissa Manchester and Buck Henry. Toward the midnight hour cast members like Leslie Ann Warren and Karen Black turned up.

Whether or not this movie is truly destined for fame and fortune is anyone's guess. (It's showing at EZTV Aug. 1 through 4 and 8 through 11.) "We asked Linda Ronstadt to do a cameo, and she said yes," Willis said. "At the time she was working with (choreographer/singer) Toni Basil and she called up and said, 'If Linda does it then I want to do it, too.' Then Teri Garr called us, and it got to the point where we had to turn people down. We turned Cher down!"

It was filmed on a "cheap little camera" with a broken zoom motor and edited by hand by going back and forth with two pause buttons.

"By the time we were done editing it," added Willis, "no one could even look at each other. And then there were rumors that it was never made — it was great, just like 'Gone With the Wind.' But I think it would be too painful to see it from beginning to end and see all the mistakes."

Still, from the response at the screening, Willis has her hopes up for continued popularity. "It looks like it's going to be a great cult classic. What I need to do now is really decide what I want to do with it. Because if I ship it off to New York I've got to get clearance from all the stars. I don't know if some of them want to be seen in black face."

Lee Jarromb/Herald photographer

Kevin De Remer, left, and Melissa Manchester made a colorful pair at the EZTV screening.

Lee Jarromb/Herald photographer

Bud Cort, left, shows some skin and Paul Reubens (a k a Pee Wee Herman) cracks a grin at a party before the screening.

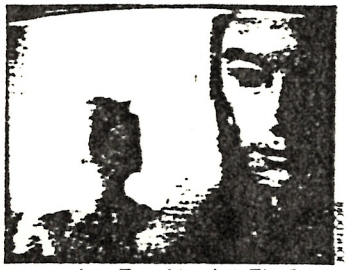
Lee Jarromb/Herald photographer

Lauren Wood, who plays Little Tu in "They Must Be Told," emerges from the trunk of a 40-foot limo to make her entrance. Why the grimace? You try spending time in the trunk of a car.

Lee Jarromb/Herald photographer

How else should the owner of the Melrose store Cowboys and Poodles dress but in a melange of polyester? Paul Glynn, right, was a standout in a symphony of man-made fibers while Virginia Jacks, left, looked on.

Allee Willis, right, was one of the talents behind "They Must Be Told," a homemade video with a cast of thousands. Irene Cara, left, was one of the guests at a screening at EZTV.

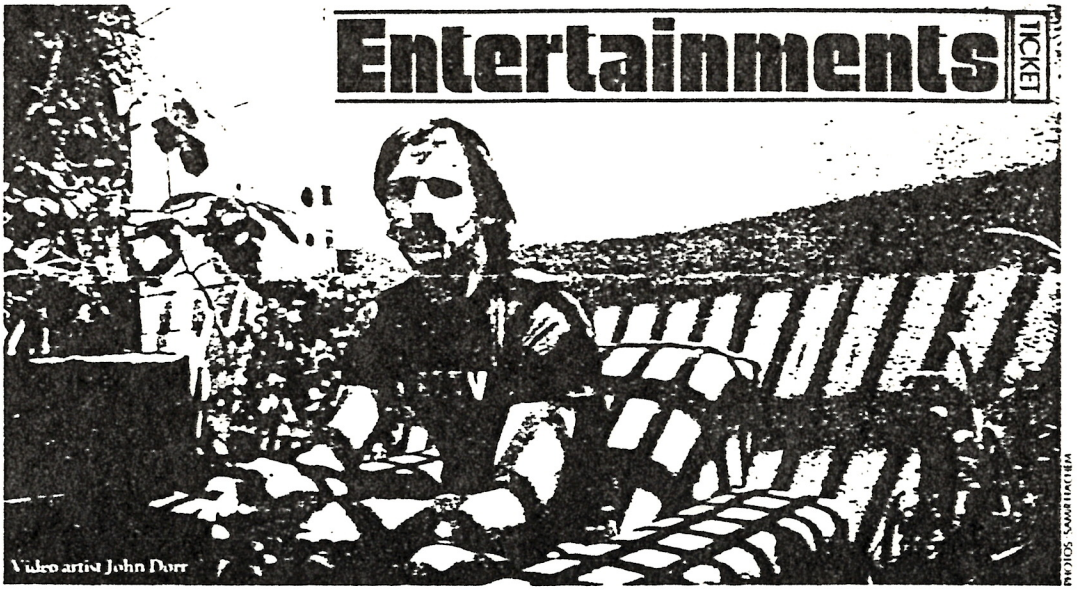


A scene from Terry Murphy's *The Other Woman*

Strawn Bovee in *Dorothy and Alan on Norma Place*

Ken Camp's campy *As the World Burns*

Richard Mover's *Rimbaud in L.A.*



Video artist John Dorr

THE LITTLE SCREEN'S DIFFERENT LIGHT

TV MADE EZ IN L.A.

BY SAMIR HACHEM

An oval mirror on a living room wall and a young woman in a polka-dot dress meet face-to-face. Suddenly there's age, deep lines and wrinkles, a residue of years. And then some words:

Her mind lives in a quiet room,
A narrow room, and tall,
With pretty lamps to quench the gloom
And mottoes on the wall.
There all the things are waxen neat
And set in decorous lines;
And there are posies, round and sweet,
And little, straightened vines.
Her mind lives tidily, apart
From cold and noise and pain,
And bolts the door against her heart,
Out wailing in the rain.

The words are Dorothy Parker's, of course. Not only her words, but also her silences, wit and despair are the subject of the drama that follows this opening sequence. Two hours of the sharpest dialogue and most incisive sense of atmosphere a Hollywood screenplay has offered in recent memory were *not* written by Robert Towne or Alvin Sargent. In fact, John Dorr's *Dorothy and Alan at Norma Place* isn't even a movie, in the film-Celluloid sense of the word. It's a drama taped on video, the state-of-the-art technique that's cheap (Dorr says it cost him $500 to make the piece) and easy (you get instant replay, the option to erase and little need for more than available light).

No wonder the young video enthusiast calls his new enterprise EZTV. "If all the people who've come to Hollywood wanting to make movies, to write them and be in them, got their hands on a Betamax recorder and a video camera," Dorr proposes, "just *imagine* the volume of work that could, and should, fill little theaters in every city. It could be a whole new alternative to the moviemaking and the moviegoing experiences. And with cable as a possible outlet, screenings in little theaters could act as a clearing-house out of which the cable people would pick up whatever seems most viable and commercial."

Dorr knows what he's talking about. For 15 years he's been in Hollywood trying, quite unsuccessfully, to get into the movie business. A Yale graduate (in art history), he has worked as a movie reviewer, a film historian and publicist, a research assistant to Peter Bogdanovich, a consultant for Filmex, a script supervisor on low-budget exploitation movies like *Hell up in Harlem* and a house painter. Dorr has always written screenplays, hoping that somebody would someday take a look at one of them and produce it. A few were optioned, and for a while there Barbra Streisand and Ray Stark were interested in the *Dorothy and Alan* script. "But then she decided she didn't want to do another famous person's life story," he recalls. That's the way it is in Hollywood. You're always meeting, talking, waiting and hoping. You're always in development.

Dorr got tired of that round, and in 1979 he decided to do something about it. "I discovered video tape!" He also happened to stumble upon a friend who'd just bought a Betamax and was working at a company that employed a small black-and-white observation camera, the kind you see staring down at you from the ceilings of banks and grocery stores. "It had a single fixed lens, and it was very sensitive to light. So it seemed possible to make a movie. We had a little hand mike, and since we had no way to edit, we figured we'd have to shoot it in sequence, which we did."

What they shot was an original play that Dorr had been working on. The players were actor friends who thought it could be fun and a welcome exposure. Entitled *Sudzall Does It All*, Dorr's first feature told the story of a frustrated actress who wants to do Shakespeare roles but can't. She eventually succumbs to making silly detergent commercials that bring her fame and fortune. *Sudzall*'s humor was eccentric—John Waters' middle-class suburbia meets Warhol's anticinematic antics—yet it had a fresh sensibility all its own, and one that was unmistakably gay.

"The fact that I'm gay means that I will deal with the topic," says Dorr. "It doesn't mean that it's a duty or a message. I *hate* message films, and the idea of presenting a gay lifestyle, like in *Making Love*, is terribly boring to me. I have minimum social conscience, and more of an interest in the aesthetics."

Ideas come to him quite easily, says Dorr. "Each project has its own germs. I'll write ideas down, keep them somewhere until they become useful to something I'm working on."

But what does one do after making three video features, screening them at the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art and receiving good reviews and the encouragement of other artists? In Dorr's case, one invites others to make similar projects and then sets up a dream showcase repertory theater. "I suggested to friends that they help me with my equipment," explains Dorr. That's how Richard Mover came to direct *Rimbaud in L.A.*, how Ken Camp got to realize a three-part gay spoof of soap operas called *As the World Burns*, and how Terry Mack Murphy was able to tape his play *The Other Woman* (see accompanying story).

> *"If all the people who've come to Hollywood wanting to make movies got their hands on a video camera, just imagine the volume of work that could, and should, fill little theaters in every city. It could be a whole new alternative to the moviegoing experience."*

The next step was planning some public outlet to show their material. Dorr and his EZTV rented a hall in the Community Building of West Hollywood Park and ran various programs of their work on weekends for three months. There were scattered notices in local gay and straight publications, and a great many people came. "Rimbaud's name attracted a lot of interest, and it was the same with Dorothy Parker. But still, there were many people who came because they're interested in video as an alternative

Samir Hachem is a free-lance writer based in Los Angeles.

For video artists, EZTV spells public exposure

By MARGO WILSON

John Dorr wanted to make movies.

He studied and taught film at UCLA and the American Film Institute. He served as a script supervisor for such low-budget films as "It's Alive," "Hell Up in Harlem," "The Prisoner," "Messiah of Evil," "Black Starlet" and "Best Friends" (not the Burt Reynolds feature).

He wrote movie reviews for a variety of publications. He did public relations work for a firm representing film and video clients. He wrote screenplays and some were optioned. But none was ever produced.

Dorr wanted to make movies of his own but says his scripts were "more individualistic and quirky than the mass media wanted to deal with."

Then, a friend of this 39-year-old West Hollywood man bought a video tape recorder. And the friend worked for a company that had video surveillance cameras. Dorr got busy. He put together a 79-minute black and white video movie, "SudZall Does It All," and "that had me hooked," he says.

Lounging on a chair in his loft-like West Hollywood office/studio/theater, the T-shirt-and-blue-jean-clad Dorr is one of the Los Angeles area's video art pioneers.

Thursday through Sunday evenings, Dorr screens independent videos in his approximately 40-seat EZTV Video Gallery at 8543 Santa Monica Blvd. A changing group of 20 to 25 people exhibit their works at the gallery, he says.

Some of these works have included Dorr's own "Dorothy and Alan at Norma Place," a feature-length video about the last years of Dorothy Parker's life. Writer Parker and her husband, Alan Campbell, lived quietly on Norma Place in West Hollywood during those years, Dorr explains.

Dorr's gallery opened in June and is one of the few outlets in the country where video artists can exhibit, he says. Most of the videos are story-type, feature-length shows, rather than non-narrative, conceptual art.

"From the beginning, video was just another way to make a movie, just another material," he says about his approach.

Unlike feature films, videos can be made for the price of the video tape, once one has the equipment. "Dorothy and Alan at Norma Place" cost $1,500, Dorr says.

Most of the shows at EZTV are by artists working in the Los Angeles area, although videos by artists from around the country have been shown.

Recent programs have included "They Saved Gidget's Brain," a story of the revenge of a girl whose parents sold her brain to buy a Winnebago; "Conan the Waitress," a musical fantasy; and "Rimbaud in L.A.," a story of the love affair of French poets Paul Verlaine and Arthur Rimbaud, updated to the 1980s New Wave scene in L.A. The 11 p.m. feature each Saturday is "Blonde Death," a black comedy about Tammy, the Teenage Time Bomb.

Dorr's also has shown his "SudZall Does It All," as well as "The Case of the Missing Consciousness," a video feature he made in 1980 about the machinations of evil and good scientists.

Dorr first screened "Dorothy and Alan at Norma Place" in a rented room at the West Hollywood Park Community Center in the spring of 1982, and it was "reaonably well received," he says.

Dorr had accumulated more sophisticated equipment than the surveillance cameras by this time and was thinking about starting a video theater.

That winter, he inherited a small amount of money, he says, enough to buy some editing equipment. The equipment was the key ingredient in opening his gallery, since it not only allows him and other artists to put shows together but enables Dorr to rent the equipment to artists and thereby make a little money, he explains.

The "whole rationale" of the gallery, Dorr says, "was that people were making movies in video (and) we had to make a place to show them."

The gallery, which Dorr describes as a production company, post-production and screening facility, runs as a kind of collective, with some participantssharing equipment and expertise.

Aside from the Long Beach Museum of Art, EZTV is about the only outlet in the area whose main function is to show video art, Dorr says.

And video art is a relatively new phenomenon, not only here but across the country. One entrepreneur in San Francisco shows videos but they mostly are "art," not feature-type videos, Dorr says. No one in New York is doing what EZTV does, he adds.

"People haven't realized it's another way of making movies."

And in Los Angeles, in particular, "It's not as obvious a thing to do in the shadow of Hollywood," he says.

Yet, the ever-improving technology enabling the man on the street to make his own videos has been called a video revolution, and Dorr points out the trend "certainly has revolutionary aspects. It doesn't require you to do things with a mass mentality."

It's Dorr's hope that some day these more personalized, individualistic movies in video will be available to a larger public through rentable cassettes. Dorr is trying to garner cable TV or cassette manufacturer interest in a package of six features, "The Best of EZTV."

He says he'd like to see a regular cable show under the EZTV name as a way for independent producers to get their works on the air. And he says he'd like to have a larger theater to show the works.

Dorr says he's surprised few entrepreneur-artists have ventured into the video gallery business and says he

See DORR, page 23

Dorr

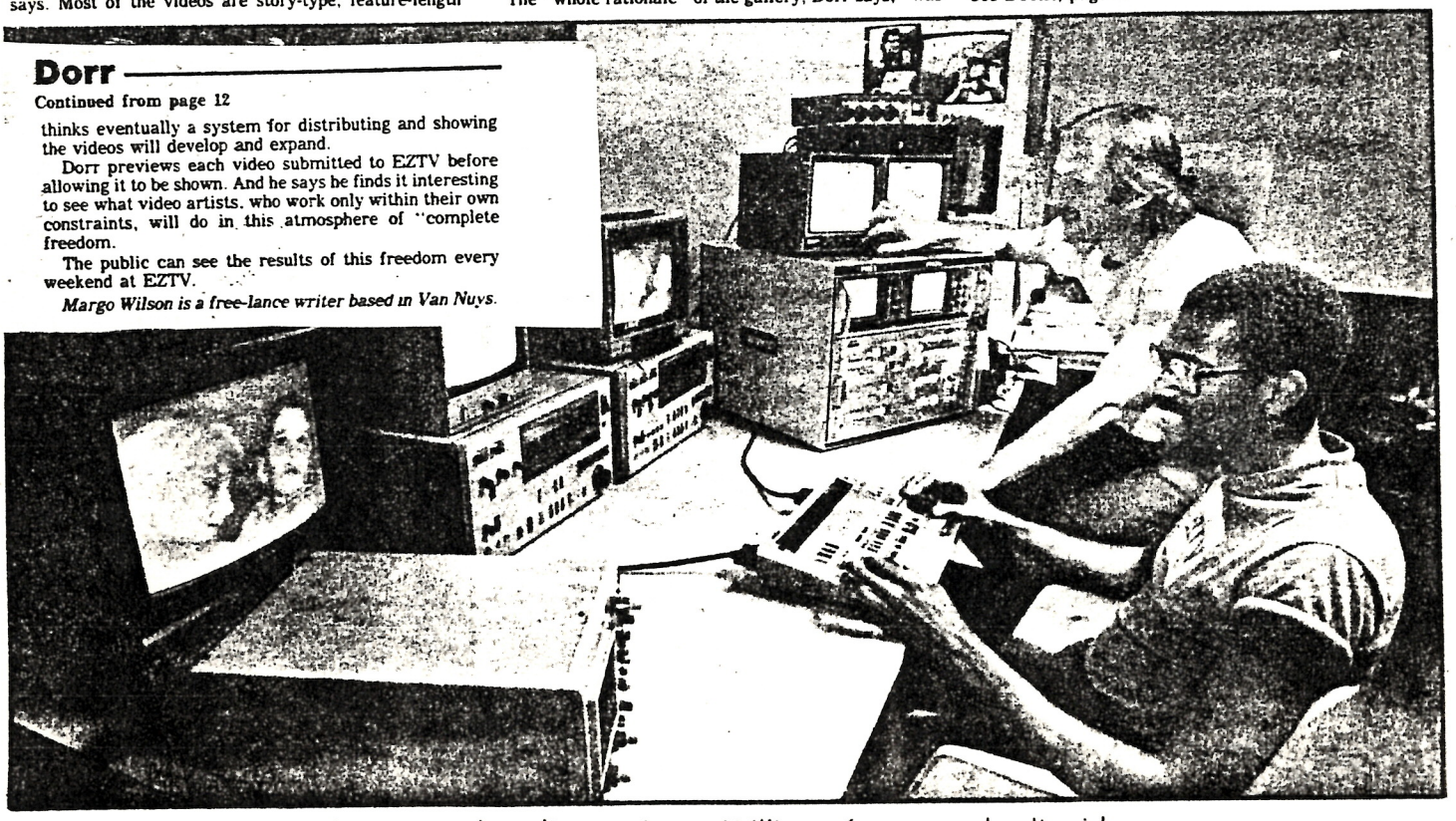
Continued from page 12

thinks eventually a system for distributing and showing the videos will develop and expand.

Dorr previews each video submitted to EZTV before allowing it to be shown. And he says he finds it interesting to see what video artists, who work only within their own constraints, will do in this atmosphere of "complete freedom."

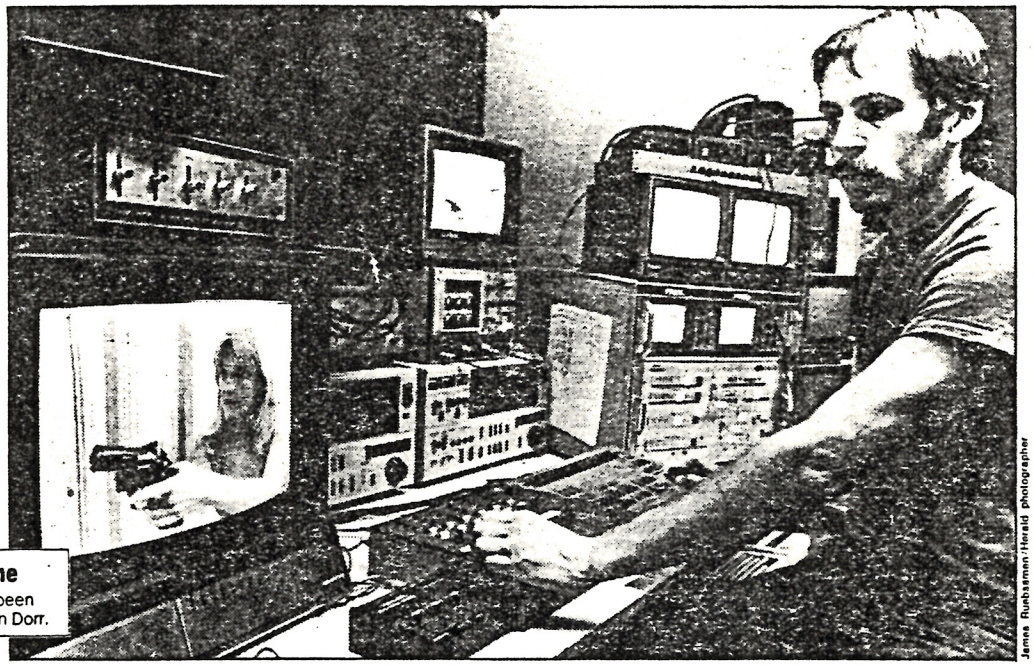
The public can see the results of this freedom every weekend at EZTV.

Margo Wilson is a free-lance writer based in Van Nuys.



John Dorr and art director James Williams, foreground, edit videos

EZTV: An outlet and audience for independent video filmmakers



James Ruebsamen/Herald photographer

From the living to the screening room has been the mission of EZTV's John Dorr.

By Eric Mankin
Herald staff writer

A good rating for a first-run television show at EZTV is 30. Not a 30 Nielsen, which translates into 25 million households nationwide. But 30, count them, 30 people sitting in plastic chairs in a bare, frigid, air-conditioned storefront upstairs on Santa Monica Boulevard just west of La Cienega.

Not a big audience, but surprisingly a big enough audience. Big enough to have sparked, over the 11 months that EZTV's doors have been open, dozens of video productions, ranging from three-minute music videos to full-length dramatic video features.

Enough production to put the gallery, which asks donations from audiences but makes only a fraction of its monthly bills from tickets, on a stable financial basis.

Enough response to make John Dorr, a tall, thin, 39-year-old who started EZTV two years ago on a wing and a prayer, confident about the immediate future. His project is even inspiring imitators in other cities.

Dorr is a former UCLA film school student who left Westwood and spent years writing for trade papers and small film magazines, working as a film archivist and trying to sell original scripts. At one point, after years of fruitlessly knocking on doors, he left L.A. and went back East (he's from Massachusetts) only to write still another script and return to meet still more rejection.

But this time there was a difference. A friend had a betamax and it gave Dorr the possibility to just go out and shoot his ideas. His total cost was figured in four figures, not eight. "I did, and I was hooked."

But, along with many another video enthusiast, Dorr immediately ran across the glitches in the vision of cheap and easy television production opened up by the new technology.

First, while high-quality video cameras and recorders are cheap and easily available, video editing equipment is expensive and hard to come by, so editing costs for a small feature could easily double or even quintuple its budget.

Second, there was nowhere to show cheaply produced videos. Videomakers simply invited each other over to their living rooms.

Dorr tackled the second problem first, beginning a set of video screenings in temporary quarters in the West Hollywood County Park recreation building. In 1983, he came into what he called a "small inheritance," and put it into editing equipment and monitors. Every weekend, the monitors are lit up with a new program of videotapes. There are a few art videos and a few documentaries, but "the niche we seem to be carving out, the thing we do that isn't being done much in other places," is narrative fiction.

During the week, the editing equipment is in use, for an extremely cheap $15 per hour — a rate that has made it possible to produce hourlong videos for as little as $1,000.

A wildly varied collection of material has been produced or screened at EZTV. An exception to the narrative fiction rule is a documentary series of interviews with science-fiction figures called "Hour 25" which screens weekly.

More typical are works like "Automates" ("A suburban couple find themselves mysteriously trapped inside their car"). Or "Rock Lobster" ("The story of an overweight supermarket cashier, her depressed husband and the son of an Iranian oil tycoon with whom she has an affair"). Or "Persephone" ("Persephone, like the Greek goddess, is doomed to spend half her life in Hades. But which half?") Or "Conan The Waitress" (self-explanatory).

Dorr himself has produced a series of films, including a two-hour dramatization of a crisis in the lives of screenwriter-humorist Dorothy Parker and her husband Alan Campbell. But the star entry so far at EZTV has been a 100-minute entry titled "Blonde Death" written and directed by another ex-UCLA film student, James Dillinger.

Dillinger made short films while a student, and has been writing scripts ever since, but the video was his first full-length project. Presenting a "kind of cross between 'Gidget' and 'Badlands' set in a fictional city in Orange County a lot like Anaheim," Dillinger's tale became EZTV's first hit, running continually for four months starting in January.

"Blonde Death" cost "a couple thousand" to make according to Dillinger. "All the talent was volunteer." While he had wanted to do a feature-length project for a long time, " 'Blonde Death' never would have been made without EZTV. It's really a way for people to start exploring the potential of video, a way for people to do things that are maybe too offbeat for mainstream Hollywood."

Some non-shoestring video productions have also come through EZTV, notably "Laughing Horse," an elaborately produced desert picture shot on location in Tucson with what Dorr estimated to be a six-figure budget.

But personal shoestrings are still the rule. On a recent Wednesday, Doug Henry was editing his half-hour tape of a new-wave band called the Hardy Boys, playing at downtown hangout Al's Bar. Henry was moonlighting from work in a film production company, expecting to spend about $1,000 to produce his film.

Upstairs, actor Arman Hargett was fitting together a 3½-minute video to a song by Joe Jackson. "This is an introspective piece of myself making a movie. It's basically for myself and friends."

Seeing eyebrows raise: "I'm aware I have a well-polished ego." Hargett didn't know whether Dorr would want to play the spot when it was finished, but expected to spend a modest $150 on it. So far, none of the more than 100 productions done by the extended EZTV family has been broadcast, though a few may have been exposed on public access cable television. "Of course, most people doing things here aren't expecting to have their stuff go on broadcast. They break too many rules about nudity, language or dramatic structure," says Dorr.

"Blonde Death" has led to local celebrity for Dillinger, but so far hasn't made it into any other outlets.

Still, there are encouraging signs for Dorr. A new EZTV (not run by or connected to Dorr by anything but name) has opened in Dallas, and another is hatching in San Diego.

And every week, 2½ more hours of new video programming bows at EZTV before an audience — not a large one but the difference between a small audience and no audience is a significant one. For Dorr, "it seems inevitable that some of our material will go somewhere eventually. Things are on an even keel, and I feel no great pressure to make something breathtaking happen, but as long as people continue to work — so many people continue to work — something is going to happen."

ORANGE COUNTY, CA.

ENTERTAINMENT AT A GLANCE

Associated Press

John Dorr in front of his EZTV Video Gallery in West Hollywood.

EZTV: First video theater opens

John Dorr gave up on Hollywood years ago. The ambitious young East Coast screenwriter found the movie capital inhospitable to new talent, so he started EZTV, America's first video theater.

Located in a West Hollywood loft, Dorr's theater contains two large-screen televisions on which up to 40 people can see such varied video narratives as the musical "Conan the Waitress," the dark and violent "Dreamland Court" and Dorr's mystic comedy "Approaching Omega."

In addition to his own productions, Dorr, 39, provides opportunity, space and equipment at the theater for other movie-makers to shoot and exhibit their works — projects that the major Hollywood studios probably would have ignored.

"It seems very similar to the early days of Hollywood. People like John Ford, all they would have to do is take their 16mm camera, get their friends together, shoot a Western and show it at the local nickleodeon," says Dorr.

Dorr attended UCLA after graduating from Yale, but couldn't make it in Hollywood as a scriptwriter. Instead, he worked in a number of secondary jobs on such B-movies as "It's Alive" and "Messiah of Evil."

In 1979, Dorr and a friend combined an early Betamax video recorder with a security surveillance camera and Dorr created his first video, "Sudzall Does It All." Three features later, the artist turned entrepreneur.

During the day, EZTV provides post-production facilities for video producers. An editing system is rented by as many as 25 filmmakers a week.

The rapidly advancing technology and accessibility of the medium has made it a viable form of movie making, says Dorr. "Once you have the equipment, it's very inexpensive to produce a feature." A typical video production costs around $1,000, compared with $5 million plus for a big studio film feature.

— Darren Leon
Associated Press

HOWARD ROSENBERG

VISIONS OF TV'S ESSENCE: VIOLENCE

"It's phenomenology," Kevin O'Malley said. Meaning? "What you see is what you get."

The subject was the frightening vision of TV violence in a recent photo exhibit of O'Malley's at the EZTV Video Center in West Hollywood. The small gallery had asked the 34-year-old O'Malley for a TV-related exhibit.

"So I took what I thought was the essence of TV," O'Malley said, "which is violence."

O'Malley, who teaches photography at the Westlake School, asked 15 of his students to tape TV from 5:30 p.m. to midnight on Valentine's Day, Feb. 14—those 6½ hours being only a little less than average daily viewing for American homes.

The students were 16-18 years of age. Each one (fortunately for O'Malley, most Westlake students are from upscale homes with at least one VCR) was assigned to tape a different channel. Some snafus eliminated Select TV and KCOP Channel 13 from the mix, but O'Malley still had plenty to work with, including cartoons, movies, news programs and sports. He collected the tapes and played them on his old set at home, stopping the picture when he wanted to photograph something.

O'Malley photographed only "violent" scenes that he felt didn't represent everyday life. "Every time someone pulled a gun or tried to stab someone. Or like on 'Falcon Crest,' when they electrocuted a guy behind a door by taking a wire from a wall socket and throwing water on the rug."

MARISSA ROTH

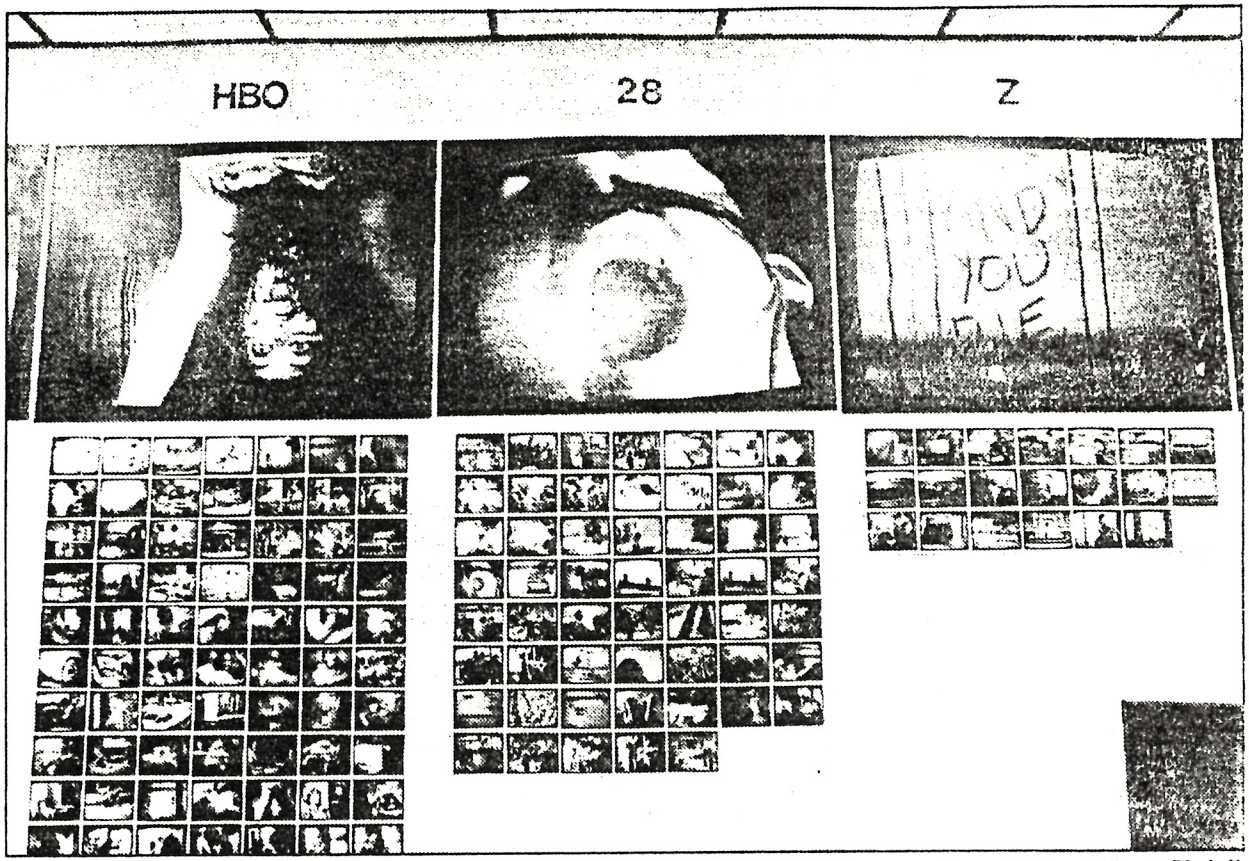


Photo exhibit includes blowups from "Too Scared to Scream," left, "Dune" and "Breakfast Club."

Three months later he had finished his project, and 1,249 4x5-inch photos and 13 larger photos were mounted on a wall at the gallery, categorized by channel.

There's nothing scientific about any of this. But the most "violent" channels, at least for that Friday, according to O'Malley, were KHJ-TV Channel 9 and cable's HBO with 140 photos each, followed by KCBS Channel 2 with 128; KTLA Channel 5 with 126; KNBC Channel 4 with 119; USA cable with 116; cable's Showtime/The Movie Channel with 97; cable's WTBS with 90; KABC-TV Channel 7 with 77; KTTV Channel 11 with 73; public TV station KDOC in Orange County with 69; public TV station KCET Channel 28 with 54, and cable's Z Channel with 20.

The display was overwhelming. Viewed together, the photographs had an awesome power, an eerie resonance giving credence to what some TV researchers define as "the mean-world syndrome":

TV depicts life as more threatening than it is, giving us such a fright that we are increasingly terrified of opening our front door lest we encounter the "mean world" lurking outside.

O'Malley doesn't pretend to know the impact of TV violence. But he knows that he doesn't like it and doesn't want his young daughter to watch it. He and his family like to watch NBC's "Cheers."

"I didn't cheat, honest," O'Malley said about his pictures. "If anything, I erred on the conservative side." What's more, he added, the untaped Channel 13 aired a Charles Manson movie that night "that would have filled the whole room" with violent pictures.

Still, he juiced the effect by sometimes having multiple pictures of the same subject. Some of the photos also only *imply* violence or potential violence. And some—like one showing movie critic Gary Franklin grimacing over a violent movie—reflect aggression, not violence.

Isn't that unfair? "Essentially, TV leaves itself open for a sucker punch," O'Malley argued. "I'm surprised no one has done this before. Maybe they have done it before. They should have done it before."

O'Malley said that program directors at the channels on display were mailed invitations to the exhibit. Those invitations also included his plea that they reevaluate their program policies regarding violence.

"To the best of my knowledge, no one showed up," he said. "And it's the kind of place where people in the industry go all the time."

So what's the point? "Righteous indignation," O'Malley said. "The best we have to offer is this?"

Los Angeles Times
Monday, July 28, 1986

"Bolivar": The Mini-Series Behind the Man

photograph by Julio Vengoechea

Betty Kaplan

By Carol Starr Schneider

When EZTV, the progressive video gallery in West Hollywood, kicks off its series on Latin American filmmakers Friday, August 21, a dynamic woman named Betty Kaplan will be there to celebrate. A New York-born, Venezuelan-raised filmmaker, Kaplan directed, co-produced, and co-wrote "Bolivar," the ten-hour mini-series in Spanish that launches EZTV's "Cine Sin Fronteras (Film Without Borders)." "Bolivar" celebrates the bicentennial of Simon Bolivar, the South American hero who liberated Venezuela, Ecuador, Colombia, and Peru during the 1800s.

Last year, Kaplan, who is fluent in English, Spanish, Italian, and French, returned to the United States to participate in the directors program at the American Film Institute. Prior to that, she had spent ten years writing and directing television commercials, documentaries, cultural series, and films in Venezuela. For five of those years, she worked at the government-owned, national TV station in Caracas. In 1982, the station's president, a liberal poet named Ruben Osorio Canales, asked her to do "Bolivar." From start to finish, the production took one year and cost approximately $700,000—barely enough to churn out 15 minutes of ABC's "North and South." Kaplan shot the entire program in one-inch video tape.

The story behind the making of "Bolivar," replete with controversy and political in-fighting, could make its own mini-series. By the time the docudrama finally reached the air—after a six-month delay—Canales had resigned, his replacement had been fired, and the president of the country, the press, the police and the courts had all embroiled themselves in a raging debate: Did Kaplan's mini-series wrong Bolivar? After all, the woman pushed this beloved hero off his pedestal. She even went so far as to explode sacred myths. Now is that any way to treat a legend?

EZTV, in conjunction with Freeples Videos and Teatro Primavera, will present "Bolivar" in installments from 8:00 to 11:00 p.m., August 21–23. On August 24, EZTV will show the whole program, plus an hour-long documentary on the making of "Bolivar," starting at 1:00 p.m. Admission is $5. EZTV is located at 8547 Santa Monica Blvd. For more information, call 657-1532 or 854-7215.

What were you trying to say about Bolivar?

We wanted the public to understand the man, and why he did what he did. During his lifetime, he fought 79 battles, wrote 2,052 letters and 193 proclamations, and covered more distance than Christopher Columbus. On horseback, he rode eight times the distance of Julius Caesar and doubled the amount covered by Napoleon Bonaparte. As the bicentennial [July 1983] drew closer, all the TV stations were doing everything imaginable on this man. I knew we had to make something different. So I studied everything that had been already done, and found he was always presented in a very classical, careful tradition, and played by a beautiful actor wearing perfect clothes. And typically, the actor was too old. Bolivar was a young revolutionary who did crazy things. He saw himself as Don Quixote, the man who went after the ideal. His dream was to unite all the countries of Latin America.

To celebrate his bicentennial, we decided to unite Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Peru into production together. It cost Venezuela $600,000 and the other countries put up the rest. I worked with historians from each country, making sure that we were showing each country truthfully. We used authentic locations whenever possible, such as Bolivar's actual house, as well as actors from different countries. Bolivar is played by a Venezuelan actor named Mariano Alvarez.

What were some of the lesser-known facts about Bolivar that you decided to reveal?

Well, he was a womanizer, he was ruthless and very tempermental. He had strong changes in character. He could be very high, very optimistic, and then plunge into a deep depression. We showed his early days as a crazy young man, when he would jump up on a banquet table to passionately defend liberty. He was so full of life. The only way he could clear his head was by galloping a horse on the beach, dancing, or making love. He could write with both hands and dictate two letters at the same time. You could say he was an accelerated character.

You mentioned that Bolivar did a bit of womanizing in his time. Was there ever one central woman in his life?

One of the most beautiful love stories in South America is about Bolivar and Manuela Saenz, who was absolutely dedicated to him. When they met, she was married to an English doctor. She was the liberated woman of her time—she left the doctor and went after Bolivar. She would ride into battle with him, she'd wear pants; she was a tough, intelligent lady. She saved his life several times by warning him that some of his generals were conspiring against him. You see, Bolivar had become world famous. Lord Byron named a boat after him, and in France they named a hat after him. His generals had ego problems and did things behind his back.

So, what became of Simon and Manuela?

They never married. Bolivar fell sick when he was expelled from Colombia and died at the age of 49, en route to Europe. He probably died at the right moment. It would have been terribly painful for him to have witnessed the break up of the countries he had fought so hard to unite. He was stabbed in the back by the people he'd helped, and only idolized as a hero many years after his death. I find it sad that so much of what Bolivar recommended was ignored. He emphasized that freedom was the first revolution, and education was the second. He spoke about the necessity of honesty in government.

Are there many women TV directors in Venezuela?

At the time, I was the only one, although today there are a few more.

As a woman director, were you treated any differently?

No. In fact, my producer was also a woman. It was a challenge to lead a crew of 30 people—that's small by American standards—when I was working with such a low budget. I was trying to keep everyone together under very difficult circumstances. In two and a half months we traveled to ten cities and four countries. Interestingly, the Venezuelan military gave us a lot of support when we needed a helicopter for pre-production. They also put together two camps for us with 140 soldiers, and we were able to use the Bolivar ship, the same one that recently sailed in the Statue of Liberty festivities. But no one ever said 'This is a woman; she can't do that.'

It sounds as if creatively, you were given free reign. Were your restrictions mainly financial?

Yes. When we started, we had a very open president [Ruben Osorio Canales] who loved television and knew how we were planning to portray Bolivar. We wanted to shed new light and create controversy, while awakening curiosity and discussion. And then, Ruben and the Minister of Information had a disagreement, and he resigned while we were still in Colombia. Suddenly, we were left without money and the channels of communications were closed. We already had a feeling something was wrong, and my producer, a very wise lady, said, "Betty, start shooting every scene that you think might be cut. Shoot everything you can, whenever you can." When the station sent a writer with orders to cut certain scenes—it wasn't censorship but budgetary—we were able to cut ten days from our schedule and every scene he suggested cutting, I'd already shot.

You've also been trying to get "Bolivar" shown here, but EZTV is the first time it will be available to the public.

It's as if EZTV is offering a preview, almost like an underground showing of underground material. The networks don't think Bolivar is well known enough in America to justify a ten-hour series. The Hispanic stations are interested, but until the issue of ownership is resolved, I won't really know.

There we were, in the Inca section of Peru, and I said, "Guys, we are like Bolivar. We're in the middle of the Andes. Either we go on and arrive victorious, or we stop and go back defeated. No crew in Latin America has ever done this before, and I believe that from what I've seen financially, it's going to be a long time before anyone else does it. You guys are making history." We pulled together. And when the money problems came through, everybody put up their per diem and we cashed it all in.

Independent's Day

VIDEO MOVIES Magazine

The Odd, the Ambitious, and the Obscure

A first look at videotapes you'll never see on the rental shelves.

Editor's Note: With this issue, we launch "Independent's Day"—a new and very special column. This space will be reserved every month for the review of quality independent videotapes and videodiscs—those videos that are not distributed through traditional channels. Very few of these titles are available in local retail stores (if they are *available in your local store, consider yourself lucky; most retailers don't even know that these tapes exist). Our criteria for a tape's inclusion in this column are simple. First, the tape or disc reviewed must be available to the public for sale. Secondly, the tape must be worth viewing—with tens of thousands of independent videotapes out there, we can only review those that are inspired and of good quality. Finally, we're committed to the review and exposure of unusual programming—videos that offer an alternative to the traditional fare. Our first subject, the EZTV Video Gallery, meets all these criteria and serves as an outstanding introduction to the possibilities of independent programming.*

We're on the lookout for progressive and unusual independent tapes. If you come across such programming, let us know. Write us at: Independent's Day/ Video Movies Magazine/3841 West Oakton Street/Skokie, Illinois 60076.

EZTV, an independent "video gallery" based outside of Beverly Hills, was started in 1983 by a group of about 25 people, many of whom were on the fringes of the movie industry. It was begun partially in response to the awareness that screenplays could be shot in video rather than left gathering dust on studio shelves. Besides giving public exhibitions of members' work, EZTV sells several of their movies in 1/2 inch (VHS and Beta), some of which run under half an hour, some feature length. The videos made and shown at EZTV are entertainment-oriented, for the most part, rather than being video art; yet they are less predictable than what you're likely to see on network or cable television. Some EZTV programs are reviewed regularly in weekly L.A. publications. Despite that and some promotional ads and a mailing list, the EZTV audience remains small. Indeed, according to EZTV linchpin John Dorr, their audience is "mostly an audience of friends." Nevertheless, network programs such as *Foul Ups, Bleeps and Bloopers* and *Home Videos* have come to EZTV looking for programming. Dorr would like to put together a sampler of their work for distribution to the home-video market.

Sara Lee Wade plays Tammy and Anne Kern her lascivious friend in the camp/cult **Blonde Death**, *a videotape by James Dillinger.*

Many of the same actors turn up in several of the EZTV tapes, along with the occasional Big Name, such as Lois Chiles (Holly Goodhead in *Moonraker* and Jordan in *The Great Gatsby*), who appears in Susan Rogers' *Good Grief*. Some of the tapes favorably reviewed by the L.A. press include Dale Herd and Barry Hall's *Dreamland Court,* four interior monologues which form a multiple-perspective narrative; Robert Hernandez's *Santa Ana Winds,* a murder mystery; and John Dorr's *Dorothy and Alan at Norma Place,* based on the life of Dorothy Parker. EZTV has a strong science-fiction contingent; they are starting up a program reminiscent of TV's *The Twilight Zone* and have been producing a half-hour interview show with science-fiction luminaries such as Kelly Freas and Harlan Ellison. Some of EZTV's most successful tapes are made in conjunction with L.A.'s performance artists. One of these, a tape written and performed by artist Sondra Lowell and shot by Dorr, is called *Salad Bar Salad Building*. It's a terrific parody of self-help classes, in which Lowell shows us how "salad building will change your life." Shot on location in a restaurant, the tape goes on too long and starts to run the joke into the ground, but Dorr says a shorter version is in the works. Lowell also offers a video class in *How to Avoid Relationships*.

EZTV's strong suit is its support of works that would never get a national endowment or a commercial producer. It's a place where the camp and the zany can find an audience. It's good to know that there are so many video makers out there eagerly pushing the envelope of creative bad taste. You'll wait a long time before your cable service shows works such as *They Saved Gidget's Brain,* a short tape in which "Gidget gets her revenge when her brain is transplanted into the body of a

Independent's Day

Reliquary *by T. Jankowski.*

Harry Hart Browne in John Dorr's Approaching Omega.

Strawn Bovee in Deadline.

Tammy (Sara Lee Wade) learns to wield a gun in Blonde Death.

surfer/detective who is investigating a plot by aliens to transform humans into loaves of French bread." And don't look for such shorts as Jamie Walter's *Louise Nevelson Takes a Bath* (Louise portrayed by a man in drag), *Hollywood Decay* by producer Malignant Bouffant, or the ongoing saga, *Faculty Wives,* on any network channels.

An outstanding feature-length work in this genre is *Blonde Death,* a sort of southern California *Pink Flamingos* (comparison to John Waters being high praise indeed in my book, although some consider it a mortal insult) or, as aptly-named writer/director/videographer James Dillinger puts it, "Gidget meets *Badlands.*" Tammy, a cute blonde "teenage time bomb" thirsting for new experiences, is miserable with her born-again stepmother and her ineffectual, henpecked father. They won't even let her go to the beach! While Tammy's parents are away, a young, handsome mass murderer breaks into the house and holds Tammy at gunpoint. He is on the lam from blowing away "a couple making kiddie porn with Nicaraguans." The two fall madly in love. This idyll is interrupted by the arrival of the hunk's ex-cellmate. They all soon establish a happy ménage à trois because "it's an AC/DC universe." The three then commit intentional murders, accidental murders, mass murders, and Tylenol murders.

The main strength of *Blonde Death* is its script, although the production and videography are also good. Not only is the dialogue frequently hilarious but the plot ticks along like clockwork. The ending is wrapped up as neatly as a Christmas package. Dillinger's characters are often absurd, but they never lose their emotional believability (or the audience's involvement). Dillinger is greatly aided in this by his actors, particularly Sara Lee Wade as Tammy and Linda Miller as her stepmother. Motion-picture studios would not have qualms about funding a script like *Blonde Death* if the sex and violence were serious and the blood didn't look so fake. But using sex and violence for subversive humor puts a script commercially beyond the pale. I'll bet there's a big segment of the home-video audience just dying for some of the funny cheap thrills in *Blonde Death* to strike their set.

—ELLIN STEIN

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EZTV VIDEO GALLERY